DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 324 551 CE 056 197

AUTHOR Marsh, D. T.
TITLE Key Concepts of Teams in an Organisation. Information Bank Working Paper Number 2541.
INSTITUTION Further Education Staff Coll., Blagdon (England).
PUB DATE Dec 88
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; Employer Employee Relationship; *Employment Practices; Foreign Countries; Interprofessional Relationship; *Management Teams; Morale; Organizational Development; Participative Decision Making; Peer Relationship; *Program Implementation; Quality of Working Life; *Team Training; *Teamwork; *Work Environment

ABSTRACT

Teams in an organization are more than cooperative working groups. Advantages of group work, as opposed to individual work, include producing a better end result, providing satisfaction for the individual and the organization, and assisting the organization through coordination and work allocation. Disadvantages of group work include producing a poorer end result, producing eccentric behavior, developing pressure for change, becoming permanent, helping management evade responsibilities, and the time and energy needed to become efficient. Four key questions need to be answered to decide the pros and cons of team work. Team work has its limitations. Building a team involves management in 10 key activities. The key properties and performance characteristics of a highly effective team suggest an ideal that groups should work to achieve and a set of criteria against which to measure the effectiveness of existing groups. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

The Further Education Staff College

INFORMATION BANK

Working Paper

Information Bank Number

2541

ED324551

Title

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Key concepts of teams in an organisation

Author

D T Marsh
Staff Tutor

Date

December 1988

This paper is provided for the purposes of discussion and study. The view and policies contained in it are not necessarily those of the Further Education Staff College.

Further copies or permission to reproduce this paper may be obtained from:

THE LIBRARIAN, THE FURTHER EDUCATION STAFF COLLEGE,
COOMBE LODGE, BLAGDON, BRISTOL BS18 6RG
TEL: 0761-62503

© The Further Education Staff College, 1988

KEY CONCEPTS OF TEAMS IN AN ORGANISATION

Introduction

This short paper sets out to state the key advantages, disadvantages, limitations, and the processes of developing co-operative group working within an organisation into genuine team work.

All educational institutions use groups of people as a means of carrying out the objectives and processes of that institution. These groups range from, on the one hand, formally structured groups such as Academic Boards, committees, and working parties, to project groups and fully developed teams on the other.

Many groups, which an institution may designate as "teams", are in reality little more than co-operative working groups. In co-operative working groups:

* People work together
* They share a high commitment to the task
* They negotiate decisions
* They co-operate to get the task completed
* Information is circulated on a need-to-know basis
* Conflict is accommodated, i.e. minimised
* Politics are rife
* Feelings are not part of the process
* Trust and openness are measured and limited
* Process issues are covert.

Effective teams, however, display other characteristics:

* People trust each other
* Feelings are expressed freely
* Process issues are part of the work
* Commitment is high to the task and the team
* Objectives are common to everyone
* Listening skills are high
* Conflict is handled and worked through
* Decisions are by consensus.

Organisations require a variety of kinds of group working, and each institution will eventually have to decide where and when it needs collaboration, and when and where it needs effective team work. Such decisions are best based on the knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of group work to achieve tasks, the limitations of such groups working with varying kinds of tasks, and a clearer concept of what a team is, does, and can achieve.

The Advantages of Group Work

The principal advantages of groups, as opposed to individuals, can be summarised as:

1. They can produce a better end result because:

    * a group has access to a wide range of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, ideas, creativity, styles of thinking, and can possess complexities beyond that of an individual

2. They can provide for the individual (and the organisation):

    * satisfaction of psychological needs
    * more and better productivity
    * a shared communication network
    * a shared sense of collective identity
    * a shared set of goals
    * increased motivation by involvement and participation in issues affecting the individual
    * development in knowledge, skills, and attitudes, leading to more effective management succession training
    * working with others enhances individual performance

3. They assist the organisation by:

    * developing cross-departmental co-operation
    * strengthening co-ordination
    * providing a means of allocating work throughout the system
    * facilitating effective delegation
    * developing a more healthy culture within the organisation
    * providing a co-ordinating network
    * providing opportunities to complete one-off tasks and projects.

The Disadvantages of Group Work

Research suggests that there are several key disadvantages in the process of group work which have to be kept in mind. They can be summarised as:

1. They can produce a poorer end result:

    * groups can take less risk than an individual by compromising
    * groups can take more risks because of diffusion of responsibility and accountability
    * mediocre results are common
    * uneconomical in money and time with delayed responses

2. They can produce eccentric behaviour:

   * "groupthink" - a closed process whereby a group ignores reality believing only that which fits their perceptions
   * group loyalty can pressurise individuals to conform
   * "collective behaviour" - a group arrives at a point not knowing how it got there (and not necessarily wanting to be there)
   * developing norms which isolate it from the rest of the organisation
   * real or perceived status of one or more people in group can have a disproportionate impact on the group
   * can unite and frustrate management policies and processes
   * individuals yielding to the erroneous majority

3. They can pressurise for changes in organisational structures, climate, and styles of management and can create inter-group conflict.

4. They tend to be permanent, remaining after the need for their existence has vanished.

5. They can be used by management to avoid responsibilities.

6. A great deal of time and energy is required for groups to move through the stages of development from inefficient to efficient.

At a first glance, it would appear that the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. This underlines the need for systematic thinking before organisations embark on the process of team building and development.

Opting for Team Work

Weighing up the pro's and con's of team work, an institution needs to set out to answer four key questions before the process.

1. Why do we really want teams, or, do we really need them?

2. Is there any other way to achieve the desired outcomes?

3. If not, do we have the time, resources, energy, and commitment to carry out the process properly?

4. Does team work meet the needs of

   - the individuals concerned
   - the organisation, its goals, structures, and processes
   - the tasks to be performed?

Limitations of Team Work

Team work cannot:

Compensate for poor recruitment
Push people into more/better performance/work
Compensate for or remedy lack of training
Make people want to work in a team
Compensate for lack of rewards - career, pay, status
Keep hostility at low levels
Be used to counterbalance awkward power centres
Disguise autocracy and centralism as participative democracy
Carry out the functions properly designated as that of management.

Where team work is used in any of these functions it will only aggravate the situation.

Team Building

Creating, developing, and maintaining team work involves management in 10 key activities:

1. Selecting appropriate tasks to maximise the advantages offered by team work.

2. Selecting the "best" mix of people - in terms of skills, specialisms, interests, styles of working and thinking, etc.

3. Providing time, space, and resources simply to set up teams.

4. Developing a team - evaluation processes
   climate
   norms
   style of working
   training in skills, knowledge, and attitudes for both the task and the processes of the group.

5. Facilitating its rapid transition from inefficiency to efficiency.

6. Changing people when necessary (and going back to 1.)

7. Changing the tasks when necessary (and going back to 1.)

8. Supporting the team - with resources
   valuing its work
   letting go

9. Handling inter-group conflict.

10. Co-ordinating teams.

The Characteristics of a Team

The key properties and performance characteristics of the highly effective team suggest an ideal towards which groups should work to achieve and also a set of criteria against which to measure the effectiveness of existing groups.

1. All members possess skills in leading and following.
2. The working relationship is relaxed.
3. Everyone has trust and confidence in everyone else.
4. The team values and goals meet everyone's needs since they were involved in shaping them.
5. They share and support the values and goals of other linking teams.
6. The more important the value to a team the more likely everyone is to accept it.
7. Each member does everything possible to help the team to achieve the task and expects everyone else to do the same.
8. The atmosphere is supportive, non threatening.
9. Everyone is eager to help everyone else to realise potential.
10. Expectations are high, but without pressure, thus stretching and accelerating the growth of individuals.
11. Mutual help is very evident.
12. Creativity is prized.
13. Once processes are agreed everyone abides by them until it is necessary to change them.
14. Communication is full and frank.
15. There are no hidden agendas.
16. The ability of members to influence each other contributes to flexibility and adaptability.

It is difficult to state clearly what distinguishes a mediocre team from a "superteam", but the following behaviours and feelings are only found in "superteams":

* People smile, genuinely and naturally.
* There is plenty of laughter - genuine belly-laughs as opposed to nervous, embarrassed laughter.
* People are confident, a 'can do' rather than 'can't do' group.

* They are loyal to their team and to each other - they do not denigrate colleagues or the organization.

* They are relaxed and friendly, not tense and hostile.

* They are open to outsiders and interested in the world about them.

* They are energetic, lively and active.

* They are enterprising, taking the initiative rather than reacting to events.

* They listen to and do not interrupt each other.

Teamwork is ...

* everyone pulling in the same direction;

* everyone pulling their weight;

* always having support available when you want it;

* being accepted for what you are, warts and all;

* going to do something you've overlooked, and finding it done for you;

* getting help when you need it and no interference when you don't;

* feeling it a pleasure to see your colleagues - at work and socially;

* everyone mucking in to retrieve a disaster;

everyone pitching in without complaint when there's a crisis;

* enjoying each other's successes, commiserating with each other's setbacks;

* sharing success and failure;

* sharing an exciting vision of the future;

* being pleased to get together with your colleagues;

* depending on your colleagues to deliver what they promise;

* dancing to the same rhythm;

* a feeling of belonging;

* knowing what was said will be done (and if it isn't, hearing about it in time to do something about it);

* feeling of equal value;

* missing someone when he/she leaves;

* being able to enjoy everyone's good points, and live with their bad ones;

* not having to hold anything back - whatever is said is meant and taken constructively;

* a tree swaying in the wind - individual branches may break off, but the tree stays strong;

* knowing what your colleagues would think;

* sharing the load;

* the sum of the individuals' capabilities multiplied by the number of individuals;

* sometimes carrying, sometimes being carried;

* all working towards the same objective;

* a level of trust and openness which allows for total communication;

* knowing clearly who is doing what when;

* not having to be asked;

* knowing what you have to do and what you don't because someone else will;

* taking care of each other;

* looking out for each other.

* * * * * * *

REFERENCES

Buchanan, D.A., and Huczynski, A.A., Organisational Behaviour, Prentice-Hall International, U.K., 1985.

Gahagan, J., Interpersonal and Group Behaviour, Essential Psychology, Methuen, 1975.

Hastings, C., Bixby, P., and Chaudhry-Lawton, R., Superteams: A Blueprint for Organisational Success, Fontana, 1986.

Janis, I.L., Groupthink, in Kolb, D.A., Rubin, I.M., and McIntyre, J.M., (eds) Organisational Psychology : Readings on Human Behaviour in Organisations, 4th Ed., Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1984.

Likert, R., The Nature of Highly Effective Groups, in Kolb, Rubin, and McIntyre ibid.

Nolan, V., Teamwork, Sphere Management Series, Sphere, 1987.

* * * * * * *